

Parks-and-Soils Sales Tax

fact sheet

5/2006

In 1984, Missourians passed a one-tenth-of-one-percent sales tax to support state parks and soil and water conservation efforts. Almost two-thirds of Missouri voters renewed the tax in 1988 and 1996, which is very unusual for a sales tax. Unless reauthorized, the current tax will expire in 2008, leaving the state park system and Missouri's soil and water conservation efforts to find an alternative source of funding.

PARKS

Support For Missouri's State Parks and Historic Sites

The Missouri state park system is composed of more than 140,000 acres in 83 state parks and historic sites plus access to 61,000 acres in the Roger Pryor Pioneer Backcountry. Consistent funding from the sales tax has allowed the Missouri Department of Natural Resources' Division of State Parks to maintain and upgrade the state park system to better serve the needs of the visitors and protect the resources. A recent priority has been to improve the facilities in the system's 40 campgrounds. These improvements include upgrading electrical sites, increasing the number of electrical campsites, and renovating showerhouses and restrooms. Day-use areas have also been improved, which means better picnic areas, shelter houses, beaches and playgrounds have been built or old ones repaired. Infrastructure is often unnoticed but is vital to the state park system. Water and sewer systems, lagoons and wastewater treatment facilities have been built or upgraded in approximately 30 state parks, ensuring that all environmental standards are met and the park's valuable resources are protected.

The response to the improved state park system and the services provided to the public has been outstanding. According to a 2000 survey conducted by the University of Missouri, almost 99 percent of the users surveyed were satisfied with their visit. The state park system also has an impact beyond the users that enjoy it. A 2002 study found that visitors spent a total of \$410 million on trips to state parks and historic sites. When this amount is spent and re-spent in the economy, it brings the state park system's overall economic impact in the state to \$538 million.

The main priority for the future will be to maintain and upgrade the current facilities while expanding when partnerships can be formed and where economically feasible. Because the state park system does not receive any general revenue, the sales tax makes up about three-quarters of the funding to accomplish this. These future priorities include maintaining and operating more than 1,780 structures in state parks and historic sites. To meet the changing needs of users, facilities must be upgraded, expanded and made accessible.

SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION

Protection of Missouri's Soil and Water Resources

The majority of the soils side of this tax has been used to assist agricultural landowners through voluntary programs that are administered by soil and water conservation district boards in each county. By promoting good farming practices that help keep the soil on the fields, each soil and water conservation district is conserving the productivity of our working lands. Productive soil provides us with food, fiber and fuel. Conserving our soil and water resources will ensure that our children's grandchildren will continue to benefit from the productive land we call Missouri.

This conservation work also prevents soil from polluting the waters of Missouri. This work is accomplished through cost-share practices where landowners pay a share of the cost (at least 25 percent) for the conservation practice. Before landowners are reimbursed for part of the cost of conservation practices, the practices must be certified as being completed and meeting standards. Since 1982, Missouri has reduced its rate of soil erosion more than any other state.

Sediment from soil erosion is, by far, the greatest pollutant in Missouri's rivers, lakes and streams. Through this parks-and-soils sales tax funding, Special Area Land Treatment (SALT) projects assist landowners in working with conservation districts to plan and implement watershed-based projects to save soil and water and improve water quality. These funds support a variety of other efforts as well, such as gathering and interpreting soils data, making information available to the public and aiding local soil and water conservation districts throughout Missouri. Everyone benefits from the clean water and productive land that result from the assistance that each county soil and water district board provides. This is in addition to the soil and water conservation incentives that this money provides to landowners.

The Soil and Water Districts Commission worked with local soil and water conservation districts and the University of Missouri to gather input on what programs are most needed for soil and water conservation throughout Missouri for the next decade. The commission has finalized the strategic plan and it's available on the Web at www.dnr.mo.gov/pubs/pub1348.pdf.

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